a view to strengthening and consolidating the close cooperation that exists between the two countries.

BHUTAN

The Prime Minister and His Majesty the King of Bhutan have exchanged letters on a number of occasions since Prime Minister's assumption of office. The letters reiterate the commitment of both countries to continue the traditional unique ties of close cooperation and friendship that exist between India and Bhutan. Government accords high pnonty to deepening and further extending the wide-ranging cooperation between India and Bhutan.

CHINA

India and China are committed to work towards a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement of the boundary question. The Agreement on Maintenance of Border Peace and Tranquility, signed in 1993, and the Agreement on Confidence Building Measures, signed in November 1996, is contributing to maintenance of peace and tranquility in the border areas.

Various issues of mutual interest, in-cluding the boundary question, are being discussed in the framework of the India-China Joint Working Group and India-China Expert Group. The last meeting of the Joint Working Group was held in Delhi in August 1997. The next meeting of the Expert Group is scheduled to be held in the first week of June, 1998.

AFGHANISTAN

India has close and warm relation with the Government of Afghanistan led by President Rabbani. India's support by way of humanitarian assistance continues.

Trade and Travel Routes Linking North Eastern States to Foreign Countreis

178. SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND: DR. RANBIR SINGH:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have taken any steps to open up trade and travel routes linking North Eastern States to neghbouring countries; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJR: (a) and (b) Government has constituted an Inter-Ministerial Task Force to review the entire question of North East Border Trade end inter-country trade. Two meeting of the Task Force have been held so far, on 21 October 1997 and on 19 December, 1997. Studies have been undertaken on the export potential of these states. Related issues such as infrastructure development including transportation, warehousing, banking and customs facilities, etc. are being examined.

Under the terms of a memorandum of Understanding signed in March 1997, India and Myanmar agreed to cooperate with each other in the development of roads along the Indo-Myanmar border. The upgradation work on the Tamu-Kalemyo Road is expected to be completed by the year 2000. The India-Bangladesh Inland Waterways Transit & Trade Protocol, which has been in operation since 1972 and was last renewed upto October 3, 1999, provides transportation links through Bangladesh with the North-eastern States as well as providing trade access with Bangladesh. A Motor Vechic-les Agreement with the Government of Bangladesh is being discussed. Such an agreement would facilitate trade and travel between the Northeastern states and Bangladesh.

Agreements with Foreign Countries

179. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state the details of the agreements entered into by Government with various foreign countries of Europe and with America during the last six months, and the areas covered by these agreements?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHRA RAJE): A statement is enclosed regarding agreements signed with West European countries {*see* below). Government has not signed any agreement with East European countries and with USA.

Statement

Agreements signed with Foreign Countries

FRANCE

(1) Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters signed in January, 1993 to enable the two countries to combat crime and facilitate the bringing of fugitive offenders to justice. It reflects the shared concern of the two countries over the glotalisation and internationalization of crime.

Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistrance in Civil Matters signed in January 1998 to provide a juridical framework for the transmission and serving of documents, obtaining of evidence and recognition and enforcement of the substantial commercial and economic links between the two countries

Letter of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Biotechnology signed in January 1998 provides for implementation of joint projects in this field.

GERMANY

Cultural Exchange Programme (1997-2000) signed in December 1997.

GREECE

Agreement on Tourism signed in January, 1998.

ITALY

Agreement to Combat Terrorism, Organised Crime and Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances signed in January 1998.

Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between Small and Medium Enterprises signed in January 1998.

(3) Cultural Exchange Programme (1998-2000) signed in January 1998.

Indian in Gulf Prisons

180. SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a)the number of Indians in Gulf prisons as on date; and

(b)the reasons for so many Indians undergoing imprisonment?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHRA RAJE): (a) According to available information, the number of Indians in prisons in the Gulf countries as on 20.5.98 are as follows (the figures available for Saudi Arabia are only of those convicted since 1996):—

Bahrain	—	113
Iraq	—	4
Kuwait	—	53
Oman	—	207
Qatar	—	170
Saudi Arabia	—	2702
United Arab Emirates	—	800

(b) The above number includes those who have been convicted or are awaiting trial in respect of serious crimes such as murder, adultery and contraband (including narcotics) trade as well as of relatively minor offences such as theft, consumption of liquor, trespassing and violation of local labour laws.

Study on problems faced by Indians working Abroad

181. DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a)the total number of Indians working abroad, country-wise;

(b)whether a study has been conducted by Government on the various problems faced by the Indians working abroad;